

University of Montana

## ScholarWorks at University of Montana

---

University of Montana News Releases, 1928,  
1956-present

University Relations

---

10-7-1999

### UM's student body president focuses on helping others

University of Montana–Missoula. Office of University Relations

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/newsreleases>

**Let us know how access to this document benefits you.**

---

#### Recommended Citation

University of Montana–Missoula. Office of University Relations, "UM's student body president focuses on helping others" (1999). *University of Montana News Releases, 1928, 1956-present*. 16244.  
<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/newsreleases/16244>

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University Relations at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Montana News Releases, 1928, 1956-present by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@mso.umt.edu](mailto:scholarworks@mso.umt.edu).



The University of  
**Montana**

UNIVERSITY RELATIONS • MISSOULA, MT 59812 • 406-243-2522 • FAX: 406-243-4520

---

## **NEWS RELEASE**

---

This release is available electronically on INN (News Net.)

Oct. 7, 1999

**Contact:** Jessica Kobos, ASUM president, (406) 243-2038.

### **UM'S STUDENT BODY PRESIDENT FOCUSES ON HELPING OTHERS**

**MISSOULA--**

**By Patia Stephens**  
**University Relations**

Jessica Kobos is no stranger to the art of compromise.

In carrying out her job as president of the Associated Students of The University of Montana, Kobos only need look to the example set by her parents. One a Rush Limbaugh-listening conservative, the other a bleeding-heart liberal, the two have nonetheless forged a successful 23-year marriage.

"My father is a staunch Republican," Kobos said. "My mother is a very liberal Democrat.

"It got really ugly when she voted for Perot," Kobos added with a laugh.

Her parents' shared values, however, impressed upon Kobos and her two siblings compassion and concern for others. The family united to participate in food drives and deliver food baskets to the needy in her hometown of **Billings** on Easter and Thanksgiving.

"From the beginning, I was taught that it's important to help people," she said. "I think it just became part of me."

-more-



Kobos' involvement in student politics is an extension of that ethic. After holding positions of ASUM senator and director of Student Political Action, she was elected as student body president last May. She and her running mate, Vice President Jerry Lamb -- the first American Indian ASUM executive -- won on a platform of diversity and experience. A junior majoring in political science and history, Kobos sees the political process as a way to help people on a grander scale than delivering food baskets.

"It's wonderful to help people out one at a time, but it's more effective to change policy," she said. "Government is a way to do that."

Kobos isn't affiliated with a political party, although she describes herself as a fiscal conservative and a liberal on social issues. She said the two aren't mutually exclusive.

"Let's teach people, get them some training," she said. "You have to spend a little to save a lot. You have to look long-term. I think too many politicians just look short-term."

While Kobos may not be able to tackle major societal issues from the helm of UM's student government, she already has had some significant successes on campus. Her first challenge, last spring, was to meet with UM President George Dennison and the Board of Regents to discuss a proposed technology fee.

"I'm kind of a blue jeans and overalls kind of girl, so it was intimidating to go into meetings with all those administrators in suits," she said. "I didn't want them to hate me but at the same time I didn't want to give up. I'm really stubborn."

Her negotiations on behalf of UM students helped lower the fee from \$51 to \$28.

"I felt like I stuck my ground and fought for what I felt was right," she said. "And I still felt respected by President Dennison and the Board of Regents."



President Dennison described Kobos as well-prepared for the ASUM presidency.

"She understands the issues, processes and procedures, and she works hard to make certain that we all communicate well," Dennison said. "While effective communication will not resolve the issues, it will facilitate their identification so that we can focus on them and make progress toward responsive solutions."

Another of Kobos successes was the credit cap, which would have limited to 144 the number of credits resident students could earn before having to pay nonresident tuition. Kobos and the Student Political Action office were able to up the limit to 170 credits.

Most recently, she urged the Board of Regents to honor a student vote approving a \$65 fee for a new recreational facility. The board, concerned that such a large fee for a non-academic purpose was unwarranted, took some convincing. Kobos pointed out that not only is the facility desperately needed, the students' wishes should be respected.

"It was a student initiative," she said. "Students voted it in; students support it."

The regents approved the fee in late September.

Kobos makes it clear that students are her top priority, and that she has an open-door policy.

"I want to be approachable," she said. "I want the random student to be able to walk in when he doesn't understand something or when he wants to know why his financial aid was late. I have a big office and a big title, but I'm still a student.

"I want all students to feel comfortable talking to me," she said. "I'm going to do that in large part by going to meetings; going to Lambda, the Women's Center, visiting Greek houses. I want students to know that I'm their president, and to know where their ASUM fee



dollars are going.”

Kobos also wants to see students taking more of an interest -- and having more of a say -- in where their fee dollars go. She encourages students to get involved with politics, on campus or off.

“We’re just students now, but someday we’re going to be parents and have families,” she said. “I don’t want to have to tell my daughter that the world’s a bad place because nobody cares. We have to look beyond just ourselves.”

“One of my goals is to get the voting turnout up,” she said. “We set a record high of 26 percent last year, and I’d like to see it higher this year.”

“I think a lot of times people just don’t think they can make a difference, that their vote counts. Well, it does. Every vote counts. That’s one of the great things about living in a democracy.”

To get out the vote, she plans to coordinate and participate in a phone bank, in which volunteers call students who are registered to vote and remind them to go to the polls. Kobos said she’ll probably put in eight hours at the November phone marathon.

“I’m not going to be a person who sits behind a desk,” she said. “That’s just not me.”

The ASUM president is paid for 21 hours a week on the job, but at \$5.15 an hour, Kobos is definitely not in it for the money. She easily puts in 40 to 60 hours a week, sometimes more, and that’s on top of a 13-credit class load.

“You do it because you love it,” she said.

As one of the few female presidents in ASUM’s history, Kobos said she hasn’t run into any outright discrimination, although she definitely notices the presence of a boy’s club in



Montana. And on a few occasions, the line between chivalrous and condescending behavior has come close to being crossed. But mostly, she said, she senses being watched a bit closer because she's a woman.

"They watch to see what you do differently," she said. "'Is she going to go to the football games?' was a question I got. Of course I'm going to go to the football games! I love football.

"I don't think [management style] is a sex difference. I think it's a personality difference."

The presidential position has afforded Kobos some unique learning experiences. In particular, a trip to Israel last August with 14 other student body presidents from across the country provided an opportunity to learn about the Middle East peace process. Sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, the trip allowed her to see both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict while visiting settlements in occupied territories and speaking with college students.

"My concerns are making things better on campus," she said. "Their concerns are, are they going to have a country tomorrow? Are they going to get blown up by a suicide bomber? What I have to deal with and what they have to deal with are completely different. It made my concerns feel very petty."

The student group also met with Mohammed Shtayyeh, director of the Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction -- and Yassar Arafat's right-hand man. Surrounded by armed guards, the student body presidents listened to Shtayyeh explain why he believes the Palestinians are the rightful owners of the land currently held by Israel.

"The impression it gave me was how fragile everything is," Kobos said. "Both these people believe they're entitled to the land. It put a face to the Israelis and Palestinians."



Kobos.rl--6

The educational experiences Kobos is getting during her tenure as ASUM president will undoubtedly come in handy after she graduates in 2001.

"I would love to stay in politics," she said. "On what level, I don't know -- whether as an organizer or an actual candidate.

"A house seat looks good," she added with a mischievous grin. "I hear the governor's mansion is nice."

###

PS

Local, state dailies, Billings media  
Kobos.rl